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THE

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

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BY

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THE following Address is committed to the press at the request of many who honoured the Author by their presence at its delivery.

J. C. WORDSWORTH.

41, FINSBURY-SQUARE,
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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

We are assembled here, to-day, to inaugurate the 73rd Medical Session of this College. The occasion is one of deep interest to us all. To us, who represent the students of days gone by, this annual event restores many agreeable associations of our young life: we meet once more our teachers and our comrades: we resume our places, and, in imagination, live again a short hour of our youth. To you, my young friends, who have returned to your Alma Mater, to resume your scalpels and your note-books, I trust this day is equally welcome, and that you re-appear, fortified by robust health, and firm resolutions, to renew, with redoubled exertions, the half-run race. But to those who are here to commence their start in medical life, this day is indeed one of surpassing interest and moment; for, from to-day, you will chronicle the attainments which are to qualify you for the honourable position in society, of the physician or the surgeon. This day will revert to you through life, as the real date of your professional career; and, in all probability, your success will hang on this day's resolutions, to avail yourselves of the great opportunities of the three sessions before you.

Much as I feel honoured by the request of the Council of this College, that I should greet you here to-day in its name, had I consulted my own feelings, I should have shrunk from the task, as one to which I am unable to do justice. My mind reverts to the eloquent and glowing addresses of those who have preceded me in this duty, during the last sixteen years; and with many misgivings I have undertaken it, in dependence on your kind indulgence.

Permit me, then, to say how much we appreciate the presence of those, whose engagements in the active duties of life demand their whole day, but are here to animate and cheer us in the important duties of the coming session. To the students in this audience, your presence

must be an assurance of the lasting attachment you entertain for the London Hospital, and its Medical College, and an earnest of their future success.

The science of medicine, originally comprised in a crude collection of isolated facts, almost lost in an ocean of hypotheses, has gradually grown into one of the most exalted pursuits which can engage the human mind.

Fed by a host of acute observers, it has now attained the full development of a science, and is daily advancing its territory, by the aid of nearly every branch of knowledge. It has enlisted, in its cause, almost every art of civilized life, and provided the highest scope for all. Its votaries have included many of the most remarkable men of all ages; and, lastly, its peculiar object has obtained for it the blessing and admiration of mankind.

There cannot, then, be a doubt, that such a science is alike beneficial to society, and honourable to him who devotes his faculties to its culture and exercise. It is true, indeed, that the disciples of medicine practise it as much on personal, as on humane grounds; but the same remark applies more or less to all the occupations of life. Man is destined to live by the sweat of his brow, but labour is his principal source of happiness; and of all others, save one, affords the most unceasing and varied stream of pleasure.

When we consider the exalted character of medicine as a science, and the dignity and learning of those who exercise its noble offices, it becomes us to reflect on the important step we take in seeking to enter so high a calling. Let us inquire, then, into the circumstances which led to our making medicine the profession of our choice. The majority of men, probably, decide on a calling from superficial, and often from distorted views. Circumstances, happily for most men, necessitate the selection of a remunerative employment, and generally accident decides the question; for few have the advantage of waiting till a liberal education, and mature reflection, have prepared them for the solution of that important problem. Hence the crowds of misplaced men in all callings, and their want of success. Who cannot call to mind numerous instances within the pale of our own profession; and in the sister one of theology, it is abundantly illustrated by persons physically or otherwise incapacitated for the duties of that

holy office. However, we are not to suppose that because a man prefers to dabble in homœopathy, or even in legitimate medicine, rather than to minister to the mind diseased, or ply his proper calling, that medicine has lost an apt and zealous votary in him; for there are many in this world who are ever ready to forsake their proper duties, and inflated with superficial knowledge, to assume the functions of any high office. It were much to be wished that some means could be devised to undeceive the minds of those who, captivated by mere appearances, embrace the medical profession without the least opportunity of estimating their aptitude, by nature and education, for its effective prosecution. This, in a great measure, arises from the very necessity of the case. Young men must make their way in the world as soon as their bodies and minds have attained sufficient maturity to enable them to endure the struggle. From school they pass, by a rapid transit, to a profession. Their friends have probably overestimated their abilities and their attainments, and biassed by parental partiality, and long-cherished hopes, they look rather at the grand result, than calculate the cost at which it is to be achieved. They are therefore too often doomed to disappointment in finding that their wishes, rather than their judgment, have influenced them in doing an act of violence to society, and a cruel wrong to those in whom their fondest hopes are centred.

But there is another, and more general source of error, which daily draws into our profession—its dupes. I allude to an inadequate appreciation in the public mind, of the vastness of medical science, and of the class of mind required in its attainment and pursuit. Men are too apt to form their conclusions on this subject from an estimation of the minimum of proficiency and learning. I feel assured that this fallacy is not confined to the illiterate and vulgar; we may observe its influence on the bench, and in the daily converse with the enlightened of all classes. Surely a greater error never obtained possession of men's minds. But see the result of its influence—what unhappiness and disappointment befall those who are pressed into a career, where their incapacity and defects render them unfitted for their places; annoyed by constant comparisons, haunted by their consciousness of inferiority, and depressed by the hopelessness of their case, they despair,

and abandon themselves to a mere routine, alike distasteful to them as individuals, and pregnant with evil consequences to society. Thus the influence and dignity of our calling suffer, and error propagates itself. There cannot be a question that medicine claims the highest class of mind, and affords full scope for every faculty and attribute with which man is endued. Probably, no other calling demands, or can exercise, so many perfections of mind and body. Again, I am not so utopian as to suppose that they who advisedly select the medical profession, are uninfluenced by the honours, distinctions, and prizes, which appertain to eminence within its ranks; for we have a right to look for such encouragement to our industry and exertions, they form the legitimate and proper rewards of success. And he must indeed be inspired with a fervid and constant enthusiasm, who can toil his way to fame, unswayed by such excitements. But there are, doubtless, minds so impelled by the love of truth, that regardless of all cost, they steadily sap and conquer the citadel of fame, untainted by the hope of gain, or even pre-eminence. Such are nature's *noblesse*, on whom earthly sovereigns cannot confer glory.

In this land, the ranks of the nobility have yet to be graced by the accession of the medical philosopher and philanthropist. It is yet the part of Britain to follow in the wake of civilized Europe. But though nobility is reserved for the successful speculator, and the man of gold, there can be no question that medicine affords us ample prospect of distinction, and of material rewards. The eminent, in our profession, enjoy a position in public estimation, inferior to no other. In life, they are esteemed as friends by all men; and venerated in death, as benefactors of the species.

Much as I would deprecate a tendency to join our ranks as a mere road to fortune, I am unwilling to allow the medical profession to be divested of even its extrinsic advantages. To him who attains proficiency in its science, and practises it with integrity and zeal, I would hold out as reasonable a prospect of a competency, perhaps of affluence, as can be promised to any other calling. I feel no sympathy for him who affects to despise the rewards of honest labour, or spurns the humbly born; he who rises by inherent worth and talent, into a higher grade, is to

be esteemed infinitely more than the mere inheritor of a name.

Let us briefly consider the scope and aim of medicine in its extended acceptation.

Its God-like mission, in the alleviation of pain and sickness, knows no boundaries: wherever the human family has carried its imperfections and failings, there is the scope of the healing art. In the beautiful and expressive language of a classic writer of medicine, its aim is thus expressed:—"The profession of medicine, having for its end the common good of mankind, knows nothing of national enmities, of political strife, of sectarian dissension. Disease and pain, the sole conditions of its ministry, it is disquieted by no misgivings concerning the justice and honesty of its client's cause, but dispenses its peculiar benefits without stint or scruple, to men of every country, and party, and rank, and religion, and to men of no religion at all. And like the quality of mercy, of which it is the favourite handmaid, 'it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes,' reading to our hearts and understandings the most impressive lessons, the most solemn warnings. It is ours to know in how many instances, forming, indeed, a vast majority of the whole, bodily suffering and sickness are the natural fruits of evil courses; of the sins of our forefathers, of our own unbridled passions, of the malevolence of others. We see, too, the uses of these judgments, which are mercifully designed to call men from the strong allurements of vice and the slumber of temporal prosperity, teaching that it is good for us to be sometimes afflicted."

Such are the scope and aim of medicine; and that its disciples recognise its obligations, let me instance the heroic devotion of our medical officers of the public services, in the late campaign; remember the humanity which actuated the immortal Thompson, when, as a volunteer, he undertook the dreary task of tending our bitter, but helpless foes, at the departure of the army from our glorious Alma.

Having adverted to the grandeur and dignity of medicine, and to the motives which influence those who assume its high and responsible functions, let me now offer a few suggestions on the course to be pursued in qualifying yourselves for its practical application.

Had it been yours to decide on the best means of attaining a knowledge of medicine, on the amount of information required, or on the time to be expended in the prosecution of your studies, there would have been much occasion for reflection and advice. As it is, these several propositions have been decided for you, by those to whom the keys of the profession are confided. The laws of the country have conferred on the profession, the privilege of prescribing the curriculum of education, and the minimum of attainments, of those who desire to join our ranks—a most reasonable and valuable concession—calculated alike to sustain the dignity and reputation of the profession, and to afford the public the best guarantee of the competency of those who are legally admitted to exercise its sacred offices.

No one can be better qualified to determine these important questions, than the eminent members of our own profession; and, surely, no one can be more jealous of its honour and privileges. Accordingly, they have allotted you three academic years, as the smallest time in which you may be supposed to attain such proficiency in medical science as may justify your asking to be approved lawful members of the profession. They direct that you shall acquire a considerable knowledge of half-a-score allied or collateral sciences, in addition to a practical knowledge of disease, and of the varied means of treatment. You have, therefore, abundant occupation for your time; and must earnestly and assiduously avail yourselves of the opportunities which this splendid hospital and college afford you. Were I to discourage you to-day, on the very threshold of your studies, by setting forth a formidable array of difficulties to be overcome, I should signally fail in effecting the object I proposed to myself in making these remarks. But it is my duty to tell you, that you can only hope to fit yourselves for the position you desire, by hard and sustained labour. Let me urge you to use diligence in the prosecution of your studies, that you may attain distinction in this college, and success in applying your skill to the great end of all your learning. Determine to commence from to-day; for in this, as in all other things, a good start is an immense advantage.

Amongst those who annually recruit our classes, it is generally very certain before the end of the first month,

who will represent the Stockers, the Debenhams, the Jenkins, and the Downs, of past sessions. With fair abilities and industry, you need not despair to accomplish the task before you. What hundreds have already done, you may hope to do by diligence and method. You have no time for original research, therefore follow the beaten track, till you have attained sufficient information of each branch of knowledge for your present purpose; you can then afford to leave the well known road, and steer your course into the regions of virgin soil. It were better for you now to accomplish a fair acquaintance with all the subjects which must occupy your attention, than to become adepts in any one science, to the disparagement of all the rest. He is best educated for his profession, who is well-informed in all its branches, rather than profound in one or two. Students are too apt to follow their inclinations to cultivate one or more branches of knowledge to the entire exclusion of others—a tendency which all feel, for all must have favourite pursuits, and lean towards them.

With the exception of *anatomy*, I shall leave to individual lecturers to adjust to your time and opportunities the relative importance of the different sciences, whose elements you will be taught in this college. My allusion to others will sufficiently indicate that they must claim much of your time and attention—and are only second to anatomy in importance.

Had circumstances permitted any deviation from the order in which you must study each subject of the course, the most natural train would have led you from an acquaintance with the standard type of structure and function to the progressive and varied phases of change, manifested in the physical and moral phenomena which are designated disease. You would thus be taught anatomy, physiology, and pathology in sequence, as the basis on which to raise the superstructure of general therapeutics.

In pursuing such a plan, the mind would be progressively prepared for the practical application of the resources of science to the varied forms of disease; and much of the perplexity arising from the simultaneous study of health and disease would be avoided.

It is plainly absurd to attempt to correct the aberrations of a complicated organism, of whose structure and func-

tions we are ignorant. Yet, such is absolutely the case in daily life. A large proportion of the young men, who come to this metropolis to *finish* their medical education, as it is termed, have thus spent five of the most valuable years of their lives in the drudgery of an apprenticeship. They have been compelled to reverse the order in which other things are taught; and, instead of learning the elements of medicine, they have been attempting to apply it in practice. It is to be hoped, that this relic of barbaric times will soon share the fate of similar institutions.

But, however desirable it may be to study medicine in the order which I have indicated, it is found impracticable for the mass of students, whose time and opportunities are limited to the minimum scale. Consequently, they must follow the prescribed order. Thus, while gaining an acquaintance with normal structure and function, you will, at the same time, be witnessing the various deviations of disease, and the practical application of remedies in their cure or alleviation. You must expect to see much that will rather perplex than edify you; but, as your information increases, you will find that assiduous and observant attendance on the hospital has made you acquainted with much practical knowledge which can only be so obtained.

You will soon perceive that the dissecting-room claims your early and late attendance. There you will obtain the peculiar knowledge which you require. Much of what you see in the hospital will be quite unintelligible to you for want of the knowledge which can only be acquired by careful and repeated dissections of the human body.

Whoever attempts to learn anatomy in any other manner, will grievously fail in his intention. It is unquestionable that a certain amount of information may be acquired from reading, from pictorial illustrations, and by models, nay, more, these aids will greatly assist, and, indeed, are indispensable in dissecting; for, otherwise, the student must fail in his attempt to learn anatomy. What maps, plans, and models are to the traveller, such are these to the anatomical student—the one can no more make a traveller than the other an anatomist. Failing to learn anatomy *now*, you can never hope to succeed at any future time; for the opportunities of time and place can rarely be yours again. Other deficiencies you may, perhaps, redeem in after life by increased exertions, however

you may be placed; but so many improbabilities must combine to enable you to dissect, that it is almost an impossibility. It has always been the high distinction of this college, that its pupils have excelled in practice, rather than in theory. Much of this credit is doubtless due to the great and excellent hospital in which they are trained; but much also is to be attributed to the popularity which anatomy has always enjoyed here. This will surely be enhanced by a dissecting-room, which leaves nothing to be desired.

Let me urge on your attention, the importance and interest of the *post-mortem* examinations. In attending the practice of the hospital, you will meet with many cases which elude the great improvements of modern diagnosis, and baffle the treatment of the most experienced, and can only be unveiled by death.

The information obtained in the *post-mortem* room is beyond all estimation, and, probably, has contributed more than any one source to the present advancement of medical science. It is much to be deplored, that the practice of examining the dead is not more general in the hospitals of the metropolis. Only imagine, for a moment, the retrocession science would at once make, if the prejudice against it were to amount to a general prohibition. The loss to mankind would be incalculable; for all the imperfections of our profession concern us much less than our patients. All that we gain in knowledge is applied to the advantage of the living—all that we lose, is to the cost of the sick and suffering. This subject is one worthy of public consideration—and I beg to commend it to the attention of the Governors of the London Hospital.

These grand schools of nature but half fulfil their purpose in relieving those who are admitted within their walls—they have a far wider influence on the public weal in disseminating the knowledge developed through their agency.

Modern medicine owes many of its greatest acquisitions to Chemical science. Hence, Chemistry is regarded as the future source of promise. We may expect, from its application to the elementary metamorphoses of disease, a flood of light. Physiology and pathology are the fields of its richest produce, and will assuredly yield to the diligent cultivator an abundant harvest. And a mine of wealth

awaits the investigator of the influence of therapeutic agents on the vital structures and fluids. Pharmacy has derived from chemistry its vitality, and yet looks to it for its principal support. Of toxicology it is the very soul.

There is little fear, then, of its attractions failing to enlist your interest and attention; but rather of its fascinations making captives of your minds. The microscope has founded a cosmos of atoms. On its revelations, Physiology and Pathology have attained their present mature growth, and are still developing their organisms. In the laboratory of the modern student, it has superseded the telescope of the astrologer, and rivalled its predecessors fables, by fabrics of sterling truth. Its creations promise yet an inexhaustible supply of aliment to science. It must, therefore, intrude on your time and attention; but beware of its enchantments, for it consumes hours in inverse proportion to its microcosms.

Physics are deeply engaged in the cause of medicine, and are daily yielding flashes of truth which photograph our progress.

The Ophthalmoscope (whose germ originated with one who once sat here) has lent reflected light to resolve the *nebulæ* of ocular disease. The “rappings” of auscultation evoke a voice portentous as the spirit’s; but only the practised ear can interpret its significance.

The contributions of Botany to our art, have not been confined to the augmentation of our armament—though it has rendered us invaluable service in that respect. Apart from the interest which must appertain to its study, the beauty of the objects of which it treats, and the poetic associations with which it is invested, it has yet greater recommendations to a share of your time. Our first gleams of light in modern Physiology are emanations of botanic science: by its aid we have been enabled to trace the laws and conditions of reproduction and secretion; and, indeed, we owe to it much more of our present views of structure and function, than my time allows me to attempt to indicate.

To *Materia Medica* you must, of course, devote considerable labour. I will not forestall its teacher by endeavouring to enumerate its charms. The gigantic volumes of its renowned disciple—Pereira—sufficiently attest its magnitude and importance; and I cannot adduce any

better argument in support of its claim on you, than the fact, that he considered it the peculiar study of his whole life, and pursued it with unwearied devotion and zeal.

He who has acquired the *Elements* of the sciences above enumerated, has prepared himself for their application to the end of medicine — the prevention and cure of disease. Do not imagine that it is necessary for you to be profoundly versed in all these subjects; but rest assured, that the greater your proficiency in them, the greater will be your success in actual practice, which consists in their adaptation to individual cases.

Students are often disposed to neglect lectures, under the impression that they can more readily acquire information by reading — an error which the experience of all at once controverts. Let me remind you, for instance, of your knowledge of Chemistry, before you had the advantage of hearing the course of lectures delivered in this College last year: compare now your *practical* acquaintance with the previous vague and imperfect ideas derived from your reading, and you will at once perceive that the inspection of the real objects of the course has left a far more satisfactory and real knowledge on your minds.

Probably every science may be acquired, by him who has time to accomplish it, by reading; but rest assured, that you will gain much more, with your present opportunities, by oral teaching, and with half the labour and trouble to yourselves.

It does not appear that Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery derive so much advantage from this method of teaching; still, each is susceptible of much illustration; and when the lecturer has the additional advantage of referring his class to the actual cases under their observation, every desideratum is attainable. He who seeks to acquire such knowledge of *these* subjects, as shall fit him for the independent exercise of his profession, must look for it in Nature's teaching.

Of course, there is much advantage to be obtained from the high-toned teacher: he gives a certain amount of exaltation to his disciples, which characterises their future progress; and he impresses their minds with much of the bias of his own. But do not suppose that you will be saved one iota of labour in association with the highest class of minds. There is nothing intuitive in medicine;

all excellence must be bought on the same terms, by all men, viz. by assiduous application and effort.

Within the precincts of this Hospital, you will enjoy such opportunities as can only be afforded by a similar institution.

It is not necessary for you to attempt to gather all the fruits of experience which may daily be offered to your apprehension; indeed, it is impossible for you to accomplish so much: a man may eat more than he can assimilate, and so diminish his faculty of growth, through very excess of material.

The daily practice of the Hospital will bring before you a mass of cases — each of which, in some particular of causation, of symptoms, of progress, and of amenance under treatment, contrasts it with others. To the superficial observer, who regards it merely as an instance of a common and to him unimportant class, this distinctive character is lost; but success in the cure of disease, mainly depends on the due observance of these minutiae, and on their appreciation and influence on treatment.

In your attendance on the practice of the Hospital, it were well to select for observation a few well-marked cases of disease; and, if possible, of the same structures and class. Then consult a standard author on their pathology and treatment, and compare them in as many particulars as your memory will enable you, and note the results. You will thus have drawn a more or less graphic description of the cases; and, in so doing, have impressed on your memory the literature of the subject, and at the same time have provided a store for future reference.

In case-taking, it is necessary that the conditions of the patient under observation should be noted at each visit, as well to indicate the progress or recession of disease, as to record the influence of treatment. At first, select for your observation such as require neither elaborate description, nor complicated treatment. Do not be tempted by peculiar and striking examples, but rather select average cases. By a little practice, you will acquire facility of description, and learn to record the essential and salient points of cases, without encumbering them with much superfluous and cumbrous detail.

You cannot too soon commence recording, to the best of your ability, the recollections of what has been daily

presented to your consideration. The practice will improve your powers of observation, enhance the interest of your studies, and be a strong incentive to industry and assiduity.

With this imperfect outline of your studies, I commend to your keeping the reputation of this College. To those who have already reflected credit on this institution, I would only add a word, by way of encouragement, to continue the course which has obtained them honours here, and will assuredly signalise them in their future careers. To the recruits of to-day, let me suggest their imitation of the examples of those who have won our esteem as students, and borne away with them our best wishes for their success as practitioners, into all the quarters of the world.

But Medicine has much higher claims to the exercise of every means of its attainment, than the honour and distinction of its disciples. It is ours to confer on society the deepest obligations, in the ministration of our science; but he must, indeed, be insensible, who recognises only this view of the subject. To us is confided the greatest worldly trust that man can impose on man. In our hands are placed the lives and health of our fellow-creatures. The magnitude of the trust surely demands our competency to undertake the charge. What can more deserve the detestation of society, than the assumption of such responsibility by those whose attainments are unequal to the occasion? What a wrong is inflicted on the helpless sufferer, by being confided to such care! What misfortune to those who look to him for all that renders life dear to them! It is, indeed, our duty to be as well qualified for the varied demands of our profession, as our abilities and means can make us. Who can practise such a calling with pleasure and happiness, and be conscious that he is unequal to its emergencies? What can appease a conscience charged with the death or mutilation of a fellow-being, through culpable ignorance or incompetence?

Then, as you value your own happiness, and hope to be the means of others' welfare, cherish a high sense of the importance of your profession, and devote your best energies to its pursuit. It will afford you opportunities of doing good, which are not consigned to any other calling; and in its exercise, repay your labours with the most exalted feelings which can animate your hearts.

Impressed by such considerations, let no momentary perceptions of personal advantage tempt you to despise the relations in which you are placed towards the public on the one hand, and towards your profession on the other. Rest assured, that the remorse of an unkind action will bitterly counterpoise the real or imaginary profit so obtained; while the consciousness of the regard and esteem of your own profession, will contribute one of the best and purest incentives to combat the liabilities to which all are exposed.

If men were only actuated by the grand maxim of "doing to others as they would have others do to them," there would be little occasion for the unseemly communications which often tarnish the pages of our periodicals.

Remember that Medicine is a progressive science, and strive to contribute to its advancement. If he is a benefactor of his species, who causes one grain of corn to grow, where only throve a weed — you shall much more win the title by contributing a fact to science, or by investing one with moment.

Though you may not win the immortality, in Medicine, of a Hunter, nor even grace its literature by a volume which shall outlive your dust, you may, in your own sphere, do much to uphold its reputation and dignity, by a conscientious and zealous exercise of its functions; and so resign your trust in the hope of a higher one.